

Under Vladimir Putin, several new tendencies are determining the social and political climate in the country. The Kremlin administration is keenly trying to implement the new but very old ideology of "derzhavnost" (an increased role of the state in all aspects of life) and pan-Slavic patriotism, which is reinforced by several fundamental legislative acts and the monopolistic influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) on the life of the whole country. The following new official steps strengthen and extend this ideology. I mention here only several such events, but it is quite enough for measuring the society social temperature and understanding the course Russia is heading on:

Efforts to control the media, including electronic (for example, Andrey Babitsky's case, persecutions of Media-Most and Vladimir Gousinsky, pressure on Boris Berezovsky to make him to transfer his shares in the TV station ORT to the state, the monitoring of the Internet under SORM-2, the recent attack on Sergey Grigoryants' "Glasnost" Foundation);

Military activity (testing new weapons at the North nuclear firing ground and new torpedoes by the nuclear submarine "Kursk" in the Barents Sea, restoring mandatory military training in the schools and special military short-term summer camps for teenagers), severe persecution of people who insist on their right to alternative military service (Dmitry Neverovsky and some other cases);

Continuing persecution of the environmental activists and scientists (Aleksandr Nikitin, Grigory Pasko, Vladimir Soifer cases), secrecy paranoia and spy mania (Igor Sutyagin's case and the refusal to accept foreign help to rescue the crew of the "Kursk" at the first moments of the tragedy);

The centralization of power (Putin's regional envoys, mostly from the KGB, the limitation of governors' influence by re-organizing the Federation Council);

Signs of acceptance and even approval by Putin of nationalistic and chauvinistic forces (granting meeting to anti-Semitic publisher Aleksandr Prokhanov, ties with anti-Semitic ideologue Aleksandr Dugin, who is Duma Speaker Gennady Seleznev's assistant and recently became a volunteer adviser to the Kremlin administration, the silent and sometimes open encouragement of the infamous anti-Semitic governor of Krasnodar Kray Nikolai Kondratenko, the anti-Semitic article written this month by Aleksandr Ignatov, general director of the Information-Analytical Agency of the Department of Affairs in the Presidential administration in the widely respected newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta).

All these and many other similar events exist against the background of an increased role of the FSB in the penetration of many aspects of society life (for example, the St. Petersburg Prosecutor's office confirmed that student Dmitry Barkovsky's dismissal from the Baltic State

Technical University was "legal and correct" because he refused to work with the FSB), economic stagnation, and growing anti-Western sentiment.

I would like to focus mostly on recent RNU activity, because this organization presents the most threat for ethnic and religious minorities. The above mentioned changes in Russian political life create a fertile soil for ultra-chauvinist, anti-Semitic and extremist groups. The MHG/UCSJ human rights monitoring in 60 Russian regions this year showed high level of RNU activity in the Amur, Belgorod, Bryansk, Chelyabinsk, Chuvashia, Kamchatka, Khabarovsk, Khakassia, Krasnodar, Mari-El, Novgorod, Orel, St. Petersburg, Voronezh, and Yamalo-Nenets regions. The August 10, 2000 issue of the Russian newspaper Obshchaya Gazeta gave the following statistics: The RNU has up to 30,000 members, between 50 and 70,000 youths have passed through its "schools" in the past ten years. Extremist groups publish about 300 newspapers and magazines. The biggest is the RNU's Russky Poryadok, which the RNU claims has a circulation number of 500,000. Kolokol in Volgograd, Vremya in Omsk, and Novy Peterburg in St. Petersburg were also signaled out as important radical right newspapers. Here are some typical examples of chauvinistic activity and the absence of a clear state response. The RNU in the Amur region incited xenophobic sentiment stemming from the authorities' employment policy favorable to foreigners and the alarming social and demographic situation in aboriginal villages. RNU publications are available in every city and town of the region and it openly supported E. Savchenko's candidacy for governor. Kolovrat, a youth wing of the RNU, was established and registered in the Bryansk region in 1999. The RNU actively supported Governor Yury Lodkin. As in many other regions, police discriminated against people from the former Soviet southern republics. A court in Chuvashia ruled in favor of the leader of the local unregistered branch of the RNU who sued the newspaper Stolitsa for calling him a "local fascist." RNU activists participated in raiding and smashing the office of the Azeri community center in Irkutsk, several people were killed. It was purely racist action that might have been approved by some local officials trying to squeeze the Caucasus nationals out of the area. The anti-Chechen war has inspired strong xenophobic sentiments all over the country.

In the Ivanovo region, Russian Unity (RU), affiliated with the RNU, was registered and freely distributed the RNU newspapers and leaflets. The leader of RU lectured in the local State University and explained to students the "sin of mixed marriages" and the "importance of blood purity." Growing hostility towards non-Slavic individuals was observed in the region, foreign students were beaten, especially representatives of the other races. The authorities took no steps to improve the situation. Former police officers have set up an RNU branch in the Kaliningrad region. The organization has its squads and disseminates publications. Another neo-Nazi group in Volgograd, the Russian People's Union, is co-headed by the former KGB officer S. Terentyev, who is also editor in chief of Kolokol, one of the most notoriously anti-Semitic publications in Russia. The situation of the Kamchatka ethnic minorities causes serious concern. Because of xenophobia and poor economic conditions some ethnic groups (Koriaks, Itelmens, Aleuts, and

Evenks) are on the brink of extinction. An RNU branch was registered in the Khabarovsk region, it regularly organizes rallies and demonstrations, freely distributes anti-Semitic and xenophobic fliers and newsletters.

Meanwhile, Krasnodar continues to be the most xenophobic and anti-Semitic region in Russia, led by an openly anti-Semitic governor, Nikolai Kondratenko. The majority of Meskhetian-Turks, an ethnic group that fled to Krasnodar after suffering pogroms in Uzbekistan, have not been granted Russian citizenship and have been subjected to restrictions with regard to employment, access to health services, education. The director of the Mari-El autonomy registered branch of the RNU works in the Youth Affairs Department of the Yoshkar-Ola city administration. The authorities do not oppose RNU activities, including mass rallies in the streets. In Orel the official newspaper Orlovskaya Pravda started a campaign in favor of arrested neo-Nazi leader Igor Semyonov. He had been arrested after the local authorities found a car with explosive materials and arms belonged to him.

Jewish and Moslem cemeteries were desecrated in Novgorod, Tomsk and some other regions with no reaction from the authorities. Tomsk Monarchists from the organization Samoderzhavie" ("Autocracy") openly sympathize with Nazism. The RNU is registered in the Voronezh region, it appeals to escalate the conflict in Chechnya and anti-Semitic allegations received no response from the judicial authorities. Even in the remote Yamalo-Nenetski Autonomy, RNU openly propagates nationalistic ideas in the region.

On August 14 and 29, 2000, the Russian newspapers Inostranets and Izvestia noticed the new tendency in the RNU activity in Ekaterinburg: RNU tries to enlist the authority structures for cooperation. Here the RNU requested the city prosecutor office to open a criminal case against the local "Memorial" society, which runs a weekly "Vakhta Mira" ("Peace Shift") demonstration against the Chechen war. Local human rights activists reported that the RNU several times asked the FSB to stop "Memorial's" activity. RNU activists in Nazi uniform with swastikas insisted here on patrolling the city streets with police. The new public "patriotic" block "Obereg" was established recently by RNU, local Cossacks and "The Union of Military Solidarity of the Local Wars Veterans" in Saratov. They promised to fight for the "massive moving of Russians to power." RNU activists last spring were included in the Public-Consulting Council under Saratov's Mayor and the local Duma Public Council. Barkashov's people are sure that the founding of "Obereg" will allow them to enter the Public Chamber under the Governor.

In some cases the authorities' response to RNU activity is very strange. The Karelia Autonomy Supreme Court stopped RNU activity for three months in August 2000, not because of inspiring inter-ethnic and inter-religious hatred but because of absence of a legal address and a minor violation of the "Law on the media": printed RNU materials, including anti-Semitic leaflets calling on people to kill Jews, did not contain the proper information about the numbers of

copies, price, or the printing house's address. Local authorities continue to insist that Russia's laws are not adequate to effectively prosecute hate groups. However, it is our opinion that in most cases, the laws are sufficient-- what is missing is political will. For example, in May 2000 the Tyumen prosecutor opened a criminal case against the publisher of the newspaper Pravda Tyomeni V. Efimov for anti-Semitic articles, but in August 2000, investigator A. Askhabov ordered to halt criminal proceedings and to drop all the charges. The extremely anti-Semitic newspaper Desnitsa is printed in the Central Printing House #12 of the Ministry of Defense, without any legal consequences.

Communists spread the old Stalinist ideology and try to rewrite Soviet history. Their Vladimir leader M. Komlyov praised Stalin's unprecedented crimes and approved his hatred towards Jews and some other minorities. About Stalin's repression he stated that "there are more lies than truth"(the Vladimir newspaper Molva, April 6, 2000).

Russian society today has no real democratic ideology, and the RNU and other neo-Nazis fill a gap of this vacuum. Fascist and Lenin-Stalin ideologies were not officially condemned in the FSU and modern Russia, there was no Nuremberg-2. That's why the state indifference to antisemitism, political extremism and neo-Nazism (and in many cases silent support of them when it comes to the xenophobia connected with the Chechen war) is very dangerous. The unmasking of neo-Nazi and the incitement of ethnic and religious hatred and how the state responds to it should help to change the situation and help establish real civil society in Russia.